ARTICLE

Divination and Sovereignty:
The Late Bronze Age Shrines at Gegharot, Armenia

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Abstract

The advent of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1250 B.C.E.) on the Tsaghkahovit Plain in central Armenia witnessed the establishment of a series of hilltop fortresses following a 900-year hiatus in regional occupation. These new settlements testify to the emergence of a South Caucasian political tradition founded on the regularization of radical inequality, centralizing practices of economic redistribution, and new institutions of rule. However, the discovery of three shrines and associated assemblages at Gegharot, one of the primary fortress sites, also suggests that divinatory practices were critical to the emergent principles of regional sovereignty. In this article, we present the evidence for esoteric rituals—particularly osteomancy, lithomancy, and aleuromancy—within the shrines at Gegharot, situating them within the available comparanda from the Caucasus and adjacent Near East. We further examine how divination—a technique for mitigating risks posed by unsettled presents and uncertain futures—provided a key source of power vital to sovereignty.*

INTRODUCTION

When informed of the terms of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years' War, an irate Pope Innocent X famously condemned the document as "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane, and devoid of meaning for all time."[1] By enshrining the principle of *rex est imperator in regno suo* (each king is an emperor in his own realm), the treaty excluded external actors, particularly popes, from intervening in the domestic affairs of autonomous principalities. The treaty not only ended the ambitions of the Holy Roman Empire to forge a continental Christian imperium, but it also appeared to mark a significant shift in the conditions of sovereignty. While sovereignty from antiquity to the Middle Ages was understood as predicated on divine sanction and thus open to the intercession of nonroyal authorities (temple, church, cleric, etc.), the new modern sovereign would be a "leviathan," to use Hobbes' term, that assumes preeminence by either subsuming clerical functions into the political or exorcising them from civic affairs entirely through secularization. Of course, politics and religion had long been deeply entwined through state religions, city cults, or divine kings. But Westphalia seemed to contemporary observers, including Pope Innocent X, to invert the traditional presumption of religion's supremacy over the political by subordinating ecclesiastical institutions to royal authorities. As a result, political thought since Westphalia has typically posited a radical break between sovereignties ancient and modern, based on the autonomy conceded to the political that now appeared to protect it from "divine" intervention.

Agamben has significantly undermined this post-Westphalian myth of rupture by highlighting both the liturgical foundations of modern political ceremony and the indissoluble link between *oikonomia* (power

[1] Jackson 2007, 52.

as regulation and management) and glory (power as ceremonial regality).[2] For Agamben, the traditional functions of public insignia and liturgies have now been assumed by the technologies of mass mediation that inhere in what Debord calls the modern "society of the spectacle."[3] But the link between regal liturgy and publicity is only one line of descent within a theological genealogy that rearticulates sovereignty and divinity in the ancient and modern worlds. Left relatively unexplored are the cloistered rites fundamental to sovereign authority yet outside the boundaries of traditional metaphysics, including distinctly esoteric practices such as augury, extispicy, and other forms of divination. In this article, we explore the relationship between divination and sovereignty as seen from the perspective of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1250 B.C.E.) site of Gegharot in central Armenia. Our goals are to present the evidence for a range of divinatory practices at the site, to situate these within a broader regional archaeology of ancient esoterica, and to explore the implications of divinatory practices for our understanding of the genealogy of sovereignty.

DIVINATION AND SOVEREIGNTY

Divination has long been caught between the poles of science and sorcery. Drawing on work by Peek and Zeitlyn, we define divination broadly as any diagnostic or prognostic technology that relies on the mystical mediation of objects, animals, or other phenomena to reveal information that would be otherwise inaccessible.[4] The logic of divination presumes that variable pathways articulate the past, present, and future, opening the possibility that the link between a current situation and an eventual outcome might be altered. We thus include omens, prophecy, soothsaying, augury, oracles, and fortune-telling as variable forms of divinatory practice. All compound forms of "-mancy" (e.g., osteomancy, lithomancy, astromancy), derived from the Ancient Greek "μαντεία," meaning "prophetic power" or "mode of divination," are encompassed here as divinatory technologies. Importantly, divinatory practices are highly esoteric, promulgated and secreted by a small group of initiates, in contradistinction to the widely understood, highly public forms of exoteric devotional ritual.

As ancient divination was a close study of cause and effect revealed through the interpretation of divine

or cosmological signs expressed in the natural world, some scholars have described it as a kind of primordial science.[5] But the mania, or frenzy, that surrounds many divinatory practices has led other observers, Cicero most famously, to define divination contrarily as a form of unreason and superstition (*superstitio*) (e.g., Cic., *Div.* 1.4, 2.40). Plato (*Phdr.* 244c) described divination as a kind of madness and hence directly counterposed it to the "rational investigation of futurity."[6] However, the focus on reason may be misplaced, as divination is fundamentally a practice dedicated to the assessment (diagnosis) and mitigation (prognosis) of risk.[7] Zeitlyn describes divinatory practices as attempts to both mitigate the uncertainties of the future through prediction and interpret the complexities of the present and past through ritual action.[8] As an actuarial form of specialized knowledge, one associated with a specific ritual process, a unique divinatory tool kit, and ritualized space, divination can be controlled and monopolized, either by the diviner or by sovereign authorities that support and facilitate the divinatory practices. Divination is thus a potent potential instrument of authority, whether theological, political, or both, and makes it possible to transform cosmological mysteries into foundations for sovereignty—what James I called "mysteries of State."[9]

Although practically intertwined by an overarching metaphysics and, often, shared spaces, divination is conceptually distinct from practices of worship or devotion, which we take to refer to public rituals that consecrate the self and the collective to a higher power.[10] Devotional rituals have long been defined sociologically as integrative cultural practices that ensure social reproduction by simultaneously affirming the collective whole and the stratified relations to divinity embedded in the divisions between priesthood and believers. However, as Geertz noted in his seminal study of Balinese kingship, struggles for power are inseparable from the devotional performances that work to define the configuration of reality, a reality as deeply rooted in models of the cosmos as in the lived experience of physical domination.[11] Devotion can also be tightly entangled with political economy. Indeed, votive practices ancient and modern can entail an uncommon outlay of resources, labor, and/or activity (e.g., pilgrimage), portions of which flow into the coffers of sovereign authorities.[12]

[2] Agamben 2011.
[3] Debord 1994.
[4] Peek 1991; Zeitlyn 2012.
[5] Annus 2010.
[6] Translation by Jowett 2007, 108.
[7] Cf. Brück 1999.
[8] Zeitlyn 2012, 525.
[9] Kantorowicz 1955, 67–8.
[10] After Renfrew 2001.
[11] Geertz 1980.
[12] Renfrew 2001.

While devotional ritual is often closely articulated with the maintenance of sovereignty,[13] its operation is presently conceptualized in various, often conflicting, ways. Pauketat, for example, has described how devotional rituals served to build community through collective action at the site of Cahokia.[14] And yet Fowles has noted the power of ritual practices to solidify social and political hierarchies.[15] What is captured in the contrast between community building and social segmentation is a fundamental aporia at work in the ritual process.[16] The aesthetics of awe that often accompany devotional rituals—particularly those harnessed to the reproduction of sovereignty—ground the theatricality of large-scale events in an affective regime, locating practices of subjection within a cosmic order.[17] As a result, spectacle simultaneously binds community through participation even as it cuts lines of difference through the close regulation of sensory and bodily engagement and exclusion.[18] Inomata details evidence that Classic Maya temple staircases served as stages for the torture and presentation of captives to throngs of subjects gathered in open-air plazas.[19] Such events are the very substance of sovereignty, as they allow for the bodily enactment of subjection (onlookers) and exclusion (captives), as well as the reproduction of authority through the reduction of the human body to bare life.[20]

Even as archaeology has come to theorize the politics of devotional ritual, divinatory practices have only rarely been clearly articulated with the political.[21] Yet ethnographic, historical, and ethnohistorical studies provide strong evidence that omens, auspices, and extispices have long been critical to the maintenance of sovereignty.[22] As just one example, in a study of Old Babylonian extispical texts, Richardson has demonstrated that the concerns animating divinatory practices were overwhelmingly political, with at a minimum 56% of the corpus bearing directly on matters of state.[23] Richardson concludes that divination was a critical element of sovereignty, at once tactical (as a means of intelligence gathering), political (in building an image of state omniscience), and hegemonic ("in blurring the distinctions between religious, military, political, and cultural forms of authority").[24]

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT GEGHAROT, ARMENIA

Since 1998, the joint American-Armenian Project for the Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies (Project ArAGATS) has conducted collaborative research in the Tsaghkahovit Plain of central Armenia, an elevated basin set between the northern slope of Mount Aragats and the southern slopes of the Pambak Range (fig. 1, inset). The initial stage of the project focused on an intensive regional surface survey, which documented 10 variably sized Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1200 B.C.E.) fortified sites and an estimated 5,970 contemporary tombs clustered into 199 discrete cemeteries.[25] The Late Bronze Age explosion in regional occupation was unprecedented. It marked the end of an almost 900-year hiatus in settlement and the advent of a new South Caucasian tradition of sovereignty staked on centralizing institutions of political rule, economic redistribution, and religious practices all ensconced within hilltop stone masonry fortresses.[26] At the site of Gegharot, on the north side of the Tsaghkahovit Plain, a series of small shrines dedicated to divinatory practices provide evidence for the importance of esoteric ritual as part of this developing social complexity.

Current evidence indicates that the Late Bronze Age across the South Caucasus was marked by shifts in settlement patterns, material-production regimes, and institutions of regulation that forged a new political order. After almost a millennium during which communities had been predicated on mobility and pastoralism, new built environments appeared on hilltops across the region. In the Tsaghkahovit Plain, radiocarbon dates and material assemblages suggest that two fortresses—Gegharot and Tsaghkahovit—were built sometime just before 1500 B.C.E. Two other major fortified sites followed no later than the early 14th century. Eight other small fortresses and outposts appear to have been in place by the mid 14th century B.C.E. Evidence to date suggests that this coordinated process of fortress construction was part of the emergence of a single polity that built and occupied multiple sites in the region. Although the seat of sovereign power is not entirely clear at present, Tsaghkahovit is the

[13] E.g., Yoffee 2005.
[14] Pauketat 2001; Pauketat et al. 2002.
[15] Fowles 2004.
[16] Turner 1969.
[17] Payne 1962; Houston 2006.
[18] Houston and Taube 2000; Baines 2006; Coben 2006.
[19] Inomata 2006, 199.
[20] Agamben 1998.

[21] E.g., Chang 1983; Leone 1995; Flad 2008.
[22] Ethnographic studies: e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1937, 85; Park 1963, 197. Historical studies: e.g., Keightley 1978; MacCormack 1991. Ethnohistorical studies: e.g., Gose 1996.
[23] Richardson 2010, 246.
[24] Richardson 2010, 248.
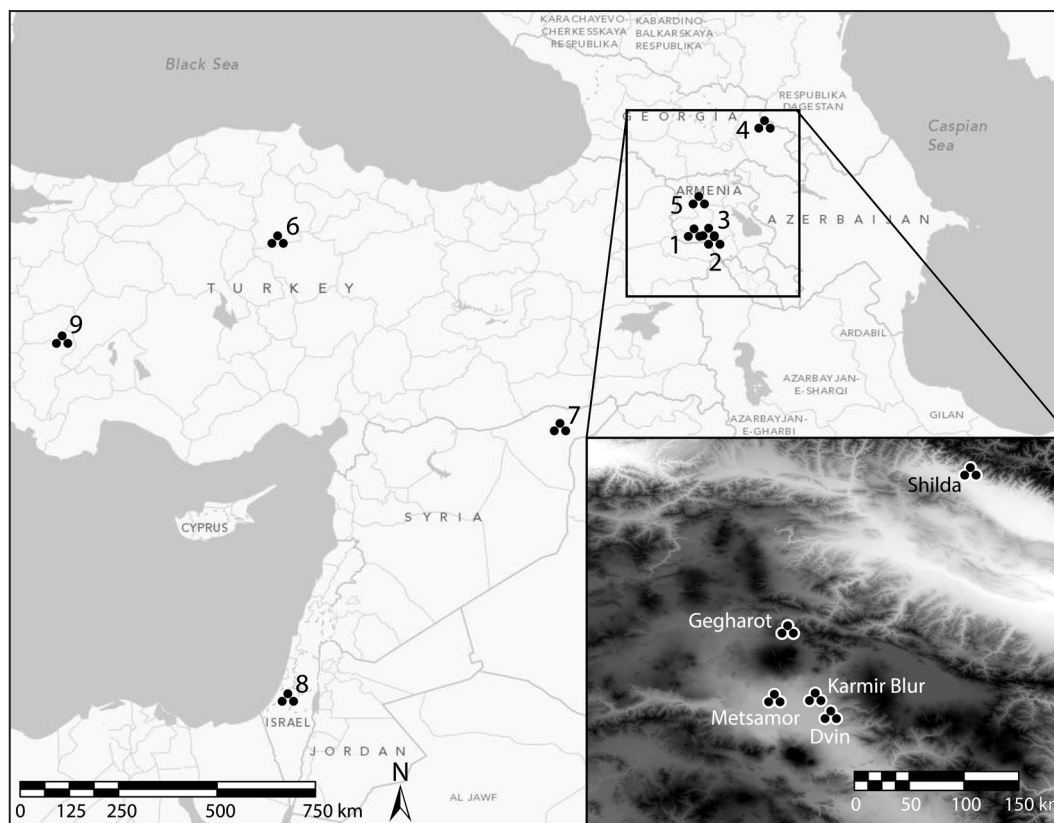[25] Smith et al. 2009.
[26] Smith 2012.

Fig. 1. Regional map highlighting sites mentioned in the text: *1*, Metsamor; *2*, Dvin; *3*, Karmir Blur; *4*, Shilda; *5*, Gegharot; *6*, Boğazköy; *7*, Tell Brak; *8*, Lachish; *9*, Beycesultan. Inset shows shrine sites from the Lesser Caucasus.

current best candidate. The site's massive cyclopean terrace and fortification walls, which are set on a rigorously sculpted outcrop, attest to a mobilization of resources and labor that exceeds the region's other fortified sites. But it is the site of Gegharot that has presented us with an intriguing view on how this new sovereign order enveloped esoteric ritual practices.

Late Bronze Age surface materials at Gegharot cover an area of approximately 3.43 ha, but the primary focus of occupation was the 0.36 ha citadel and western terrace. The earliest Late Bronze Age constructions appear at present to have been built on the West Terrace at the start of the 15th century B.C.E., but the site was razed by an encompassing destruction episode sometime in the late 15th or early 14th century, leaving only scattered traces of this initial Late Bronze (LB) I occupation.[27] When the site was rebuilt at the beginning of the 14th century B.C.E. (LB II), it embraced three spatially distinct shrines—one on the West Terrace,

one on the east side of the citadel, and one on the west side of the citadel.

Late Bronze Age construction techniques employed at the site were highly varied. Irregular cyclopean stone masonry fortification and terracing walls yielded to small informal partitions in many parts of the interior. Within the walls of the citadel, workrooms, middens, small storage areas, and paved courtyards have all been identified, indicating considerable variety in social practices.[28] But the most highly elaborated spaces documented to date at the site housed a series of three architecturally similar shrines uncovered in operations T02E, T21, and T27/32 (fig. 2). We use the term "shrine" to convey two distinctive qualities of these spaces: they were intimate in scale, with little apparent accommodation for public spectacle, and yet they appear to have been religiously charged places hosting esoteric rituals that used a diverse assemblage of consecrated objects.

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[27] Smith et al. 2004.

[28] Badalyan et al. 2008.

The sequestering of the shrines within the confines of a fortified hilltop site suggests that the emergence of formal sovereignty during the Late Bronze Age, which was centered in an apical head of state embraced by a bureaucratic and theological order, had its own theological genealogy. It is quite likely that rituals of devotion played a role in religio-political life. However, what is uniquely informative is the central place afforded to what appear to have been more secretive rites focused on managing risks by diagnosing present conditions and prognosticating futures. The sequestering of technologies of divination within the fortified citadel—itself the critical new technology of Late Bronze Age sovereignty—suggests that esoteric ritual practice was fundamental to the emergent South Caucasian political tradition.[29]

THE SHRINES AT GEGHAROT

The three Gegharot shrines each consisted of a single room. Where the surrounding walls had survived, they were rectilinear, constructed of worked granite blocks or shaped bedrock. In the center of the upslope wall of each shrine was a circular packed-clay basin filled with ash and ceramic vessels. The spaces are thus immediately recognizable as hosting broadly similar social practices, even as each presents distinctive features.

The West Terrace shrine, excavated in 2003, was the largest and most architecturally complex of the three shrines at Gegharot, yet it has the same basic layout and features as the other two (fig. 3).[30] The interior space of the room was organized around a large, semi-circular, packed-clay basin situated toward the back of the room and set atop a clay platform. A stone stele at the back of the basin likely served as focal point for ritual attention. A pit dug into bedrock lay to the south of the clay basin. The ceramic assemblage recovered from the West Terrace shrine was remarkably large and diverse, including numerous in situ storage vessels, pots, bowls, cups, and a series of variously elaborated censers (discussed later in this article).

The West Citadel shrine, uncovered in 2008, was the smallest and most incomplete of the three shrines (fig. 4). Like the West Terrace shrine, the West Citadel shrine was focused on a clay basin oriented to the west and contained several ceramics and layers of ash. A deep pit containing a complete storage vessel and sherds from other large jars was found adjacent
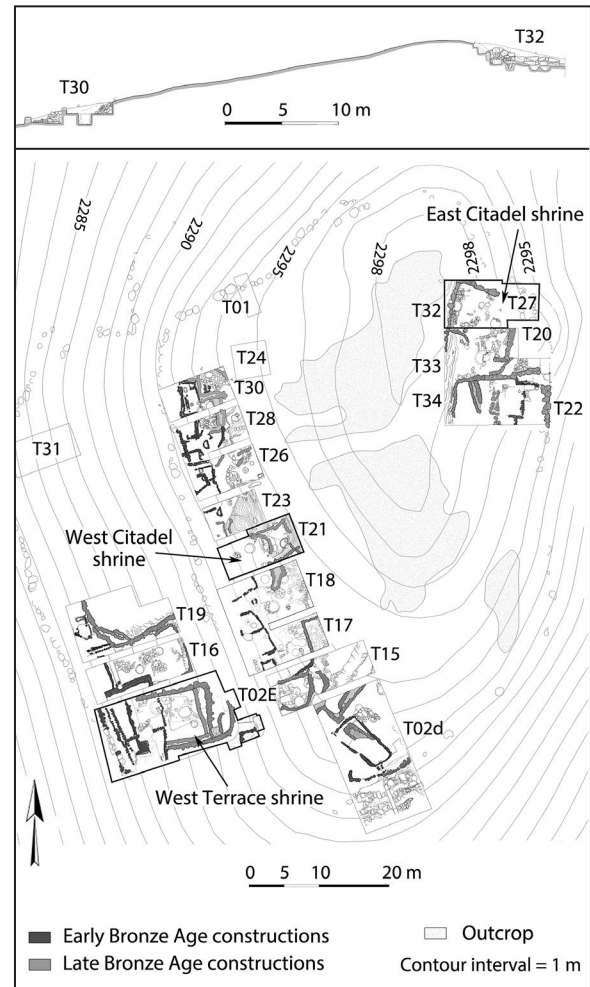
Fig. 2. Map of the excavations at Gegharot with shrine operations (T27/32, T02E, T21) outlined.

to the basin. The ceramic assemblage from the floor of the shrine contained a diverse collection of vessels, from small cups and bowls to large storage vessels. Of particular note was an unusual ceramic form found inside the basin. Known in Armenian as a *manghal*, the object is oval with flat, straight sides and openings at both ends (fig. 5d).

The East Citadel shrine, excavated in 2010 and 2011, has yielded the most diverse assemblage of artifacts linked to practices of divination.[31] Like the other two shrines, the East Citadel shrine was focused on a clay

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[29] Smith 2012.

[30] Badalyan et al. 2008, (forthcoming). Note that in the first report on the West Terrace shrine (Smith et al. 2004, 29), it was labeled as found in the "T02 area of the western terrace." A corner of the shrine was first documented in opera-

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tion T02C in 2002 but then fully exposed in the excavation of operation T02E beginning in 2003. Hence, it is now generally referred to as the T02E, or West Terrace, shrine.

[31] Badalyan et al. (forthcoming).

Fig. 3. The West Terrace (T02E) shrine.

Fig. 4. The West Citadel (T21) shrine.

Fig. 5. Selected ceramics from the Gegharot shrines: *a*, funnel from the West Terrace shrine; *b*, funnel from the East Citadel shrine; *c*, censers from the West Terrace shrine; *d*, *manghals* from the East Citadel shrine.

basin, although this one was set atop a raised clay platform (figs. 6, 7). The basin was flanked on the north side by a stone bench—atop which we uncovered a large storage vessel slumped onto its side—and on the south by a small clay platform, where a ceramic *manghal* (similar to the one found in the West Citadel shrine) was perched. Near the southern limit of the room was a grinding installation with a groundstone platform, a small clay collecting basin, and at least two complete, handheld grinding stones. Adjacent to the platform were two largely complete mid-sized storage jars.

The eastern portion of the East Citadel shrine contained an encompassing array of in situ ceramic vessels, including everything from large pithoi to small jars, cups, and bowls (more than 45 complete vessels in all). Interestingly, this storage area included several

vessels identical to those found in and around the clay basin, including storage jars, cups, and bowls, as well as an additional *manghal*. Macrobotanical, phytolith, and pollen analyses from the ceramic assemblage indicate wheat processing and storage as well as wine consumption.[32] The clay basin in the East Citadel shrine was

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[32] Cummings and Yost 2011.

Fig. 6. Close-up of the East Citadel shrine (T27/32) basin.

centered on the interior north–south wall and contained ceramic assemblages dominated by relatively small, closed vessels that may have been used in the consumption of substances stored in the larger vessels that were adjacent to the clay platform.

In addition to sharing analogous architectural organizations, the shrines at Gegharot contained comparable material assemblages, indicating formalization, if not standardization, of activities surrounding mystical practices. The hieratic nature of these spaces is most demonstrably indicated by the presence of clay idols, three of which were found in the West Terrace shrine and two more of which were discovered in the basin in the East Citadel shrine. Although not identical, these sculpted clay figures share several formal traits, including the presence of vaguely anthropomorphic shapes and hornlike protrusions (fig. 8a, b). The idols were found in close proximity to ceramic forms that are most clearly linked to the combustion of aromatic or other substances. Indeed, the burning of substances—perhaps as an element of the trance, or Platonic "madness," often described as critical to divination[33]—appears to have been an important activity associated with the shrines at Gegharot. It is indicated by the presence of both simple and elaborate ceramic censers within or adjacent to the basins. The
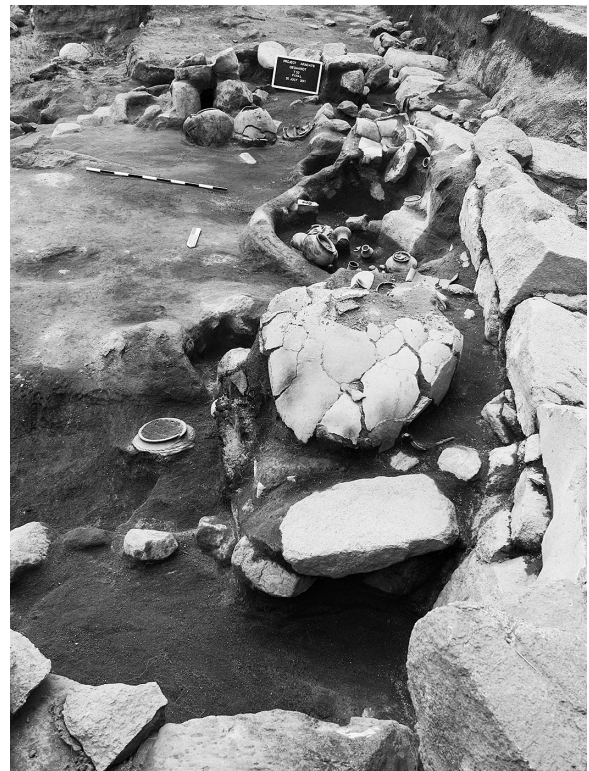

Fig. 7. The East Citadel shrine (T27/32).
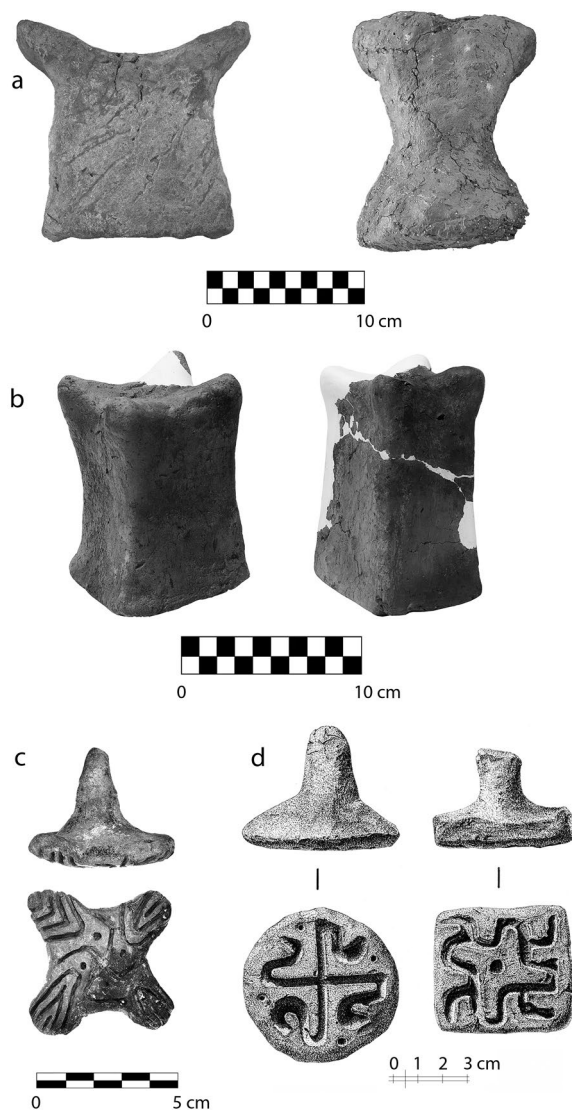
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[33] Tedlock 2001, 190.

Fig. 8. Selected small finds from the Gegharot shrines: *a*, anthropomorphic clay idols from the West Terrace shrine; *b*, anthropomorphic clay idols from the East Citadel shrine; *c*, clay stamp from the East Citadel shrine; *d*, clay stamps from the West Terrace shrine.

West Terrace shrine contained two censers, both ornately decorated with incised wavelike patterns, and what may be a simple chimney; the basin of the East Citadel shrine also included an in situ chimney with evidence of burning on the wide end, which was found embedded in the ash. Taken in conjunction with the prevalence of ash in the basins, the censers clearly indicate that the burning of substances and the channeling of smoke were elements of esoteric ritual practice. Indeed, across the three shrines, excavations have uncovered evidence for three forms of divinatory practice:

osteomancy (specifically, astragalomancy using knucklebones of quadrupeds), lithomancy (divination by stones), and aleuromancy (divination with flour).

Evidence for osteomancy was found in all three shrines, where caches of cattle and ovicaprid astragali included "dice" that were polished, burned, and often incised with regular patterns of linear striations on one side. *Bos* (cattle) astragali are more numerous than ovicaprid (sheep/goat) astragali in all three shrine contexts (table 1). The 97 total cattle astragali represent at least 61 individual animals (minimum number of individuals [MNI] calculated based on left astragali), while the 62 total ovicaprid astragali represent at least 31 animals (MNI calculated based on left and right astragali). Ovicaprid astragali occur in perfect symmetry across the whole site, with 31 left and 31 right astragali present, and this 1:1 left-to-right ratio is roughly preserved in both the West Terrace shrine (15, or 48.4%, left astragali to 16, or 51.6%, right astragali) and East Citadel shrine (11, or 45.8%, left astragali to 13, or 54.2%, right astragali). The West Citadel shrine contained more left (5, or 71.4%) than right (2, or 28.6%) ovicaprid astragali; however, the small sample size in this shrine (only 7 total) may account for this offset. Overall, there does not appear to be a preference for curating left or right ovicaprid astragali. There does, however, appear to be a preference for left cattle astragali within each individual shrine. In the West Terrace shrine, 48 cattle astragali were recovered, 30 (62.5%) of which were from the left side of the animal, while the remaining 18 (37.5%) were from the right side. The East Citadel shrine contained 36 cattle astragali, with 23 (63.9%) left and 13 (36.1%) right. A similar propensity for left astragali is found in the West Citadel shrine, where 8 out of 13 (61.5%) astragali were left astragali. In all three cases, a ratio of approximately two left astragali to every one right astragalus indicates a predilection toward curating astragali from the left side of the animal. The emphasis on left astragali in these shrine contexts is all the more striking when one considers the cattle astragali from nonshrine contexts, which include 84 left astragali (48.8% of the assemblage) and 88 right astragali (51.2% of the assemblage). The large number of cattle astragali and especially the asymmetrical ratio of left to right astragali suggest both a preference for *Bos* over ovicaprid in divinatory rituals and a clear privilege accorded to the left side of the body.

Astragali are often associated with cultic activities in the ancient Caucasus, Near East, and Aegean. At the site of Horom in the southern Shirak Plain, just 28.3 km west of Gegharot, excavators uncovered a cultic complex that included a cache of 45 astragali that they

Table 1. Number of Cattle and Sheep/Goat Astragali by Context at Gegharot.

Context	Species	Left Astragali	Right Astragali	Total
West Citadel shrine	Cattle (*Bos* sp.)	8	5	13
	Sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*)	5	2	7
East Citadel shrine	Cattle (*Bos* sp.)	23	13	36
	Sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*)	11	13	24
West Terrace shrine	Cattle (*Bos* sp.)	30	18	48
	Sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*)	15	16	31
Nonshrine contexts	Cattle (*Bos* sp.)	84	88	172
	Sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*)	107	117	224
Entirety of settlement	Cattle (*Bos* sp.)	145	124	269
	Sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*)	138	148	286

suggest may have been used for divination.[34] A cache of 165 phalanges and 5 astragali from an Early Hellenistic–period pit at Uplistsikhe in central Georgia testifies to the remarkable durability of osteomantic traditions in the region.[35] Gilmour and others have suggested that the rolling of the knucklebones functioned as a divinatory activity,[36] and indeed the term "astragalomancy" today describes any form of divination by the casting of lots or dice. Yasur-Landau et al. note that in Mesopotamian and Canaanite texts there is evidence for reserving sacrifices from the right side of the animal for the gods and their attendants.[37] Perhaps the predominance of left cattle astragali from all three shrines indicates a similar allocation of right astragali to the divinity at Gegharot. The striated markings on the astragali likely served to differentiate the dice. The diviner would have read these markings, together with the distribution of the dice once they were thrown, to understand the portents.

Evidence for lithomancy at Gegharot has been found only in the East Citadel shrine, where a cache of 18 small pebbles was found inside the basin. These stones appear to have been selected for their smooth, rounded shape and their color palette, which ranged from black and dark gray to white, green, and red. All the pebbles were smoothed, but none displayed any conspicuous markings. At present, the use of so-called divining stones is not well attested in textual sources from the ancient Mediterranean, Caucasus, or Near East, although it has been ethnographically documented in Eurasian shamanic traditions.[38] Powerful stones have been previously recovered archaeologically, most notably those associated with caches of "spirit materials" that include other, better-known media of divination.[39] In the case of the Gegharot shrines, when the stones are taken as part of the larger corpus of spirit materials found within the East Citadel shrine, it is quite difficult to provide an explanation for their presence that does not implicate them in lithomantic practices.

Evidence for aleuromancy at Gegharot is almost entirely circumstantial and is likewise generally limited to the East Citadel shrine, where the presence of the grinding installation is conspicuous. Aleuromancy is not well represented in the omen literature from the ancient Near East, perhaps because it was a vernacular tradition of the poor as opposed to a technique favored by professional diviners.[40] The use of flour in ancient divinatory practice appears to have been highly variable. One form involved reading piles of ground flour,[41] while another required mixing flour with water to form a slurry that could be read directly (cf. lecanomancy) or poured out and the residue interpreted.[42] Another form required that the flour be

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[34] Badalyan et al. 1994, 17–18.
[35] Khakhutaishvili 1970, 107, pls. 45–7.
[36] Gilmour 1997; see also, e.g., Koerper and Whitney-Desautels 1999; van Binsbergen 2013.
[37] Yasur-Landau et al. 2012.

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[38] See, e.g., Pedersen 2001, 422.
[39] See, e.g., Leone 2005, 203.
[40] George and Al-Rawi 1996.
[41] Brown 2006.
[42] Annus 2010.

made into a paste and formed into a cosmogram or effigies.[43] In still another form, the flour was worked into balls of dough that were marked and baked, sometimes with slips of paper inside (as is done with fortune cookies).[44] The behavior of the dough in the fire and the text encased in a selected cake served as portents.

What is conspicuous about the grinding installation in the East Citadel shrine is the lack of a formal oven for bread baking. The basin was clearly used for burning materials and certainly could have been used to bake small balls of dough, but it is unlikely that it would have been used to cook loaves of bread. If small lumps of dough were prepared in the basin, how might they have been marked to help distinguish the portents? This question may help us understand another set of instruments prominent within the shrine assemblages: clay stamps. The presence of ceramic stamps in the West Terrace and East Citadel shrines presents a curious archaeological problem. In the absence of clay sealings, we have little evidence for what these stamps were used to mark, but it must have been a perishable material. One possibility (admittedly among many others) is that the stamps marked the dough that was then used for aleuromancy.

The assemblages from Gegharot's shrines were not limited to the tools of divination. Ceramic assemblages from each of the shrines are remarkably similar and wide-ranging, containing large storage vessels, bowls, serving dishes, and smaller cups and jars, in addition to more unique ceramic forms. Most enigmatic are the oval *manghals*, whose function remains unclear. They are approximately 50 cm long x 20 cm wide x 35 cm high, are open at one end, and have a 35 cm long x 5–10 cm wide slit at the opposite end. One *manghal* was found in the West Citadel shrine, positioned on a platform just to the left of the clay basin, while a second and third were found in the East Citadel shrine, one of these similarly situated near the basin there. At least one other example of this ceramic form is known from the Tsaghkahovit Plain. It was excavated at the contemporaneous hilltop settlement at Aragatsi Berd, less than 5 km to the east.[45]

Personal adornments also appear to have been of considerable importance to the religio-political practices that shaped life at Late Bronze Age Gegharot. Bronze and carnelian jewelry, including bracelets, pins, and beads, were found in both the West Terrace and the East Citadel shrines, perhaps serving as a way of marking specific individuals as unique. More telling is the central portion of a tripartite jewelry mold, which was found in the West Terrace shrine and is reminiscent of similar molds from other Late Bronze Age sites in the region both in ritual (e.g., Dvin) and mortuary (e.g., Lori-Berd) contexts.[46] A small ceramic crucible from the West Terrace shrine provides additional evidence for a significant link between metalworking and mystical practices that took place within Gegharot's shrines.

Taken together, the shared architectural attributes and similar material assemblages from the three shrines at Gegharot speak to the formalization of esoteric ritual practice during the Late Bronze Age in the South Caucasus. Despite evidence for these similar rites taking place within each space, it is not clear, at present, how to characterize the relationship between the three shrines, although their synchronic use, close proximity to one another, and location within the fortification walls of the citadel suggest that they operated as a unified cultic complex rather than as rival schools of esoteric knowledge. The close articulation of the shrines within the space of the fortified hilltop site also indicates that an understanding of sovereignty during the era of initial complexity in the region must integrate an account of the practices of divination. In the final segment of this article, we look outward from Gegharot to comparable ritual spaces from the region and farther afield to locate Gegharot within a wider ecumene.

REGIONAL COMPARANDA

The most direct comparanda for the Gegharot shrines come from the site of Metsamor in the Ararat Plain, 63 km to the south (see fig. 1).[47] In the course of excavations conducted during the late 1960s and early 1970s, researchers uncovered two adjacent shrines on a large terrace that defines the northwestern limit of the site.[48] Both shrines date to the Iron I period (ca. 1150–780 B.C.E.) that immediately succeeds, and is largely continuous with, the Late Bronze Age in the region. As at Gegharot, both shrines at Metsamor consisted of rectangular rooms centered on a clay basin backed by a ceramic stele. The Metsamor stelae were considerably more elaborate than those found at Gegharot. Both sanctuaries also contained adjacent clay bins with small grinding stones analogous to the much larger groundstone installation in the East Citadel shrine at Gegharot. Although we lack

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[43] Cosmogram: Reiner 1960. Effigies: Lambert 1957; Faraone 1991.

[44] Forbes 1959.

[45] Greene 2013.

[46] Badalyan et al. 2008.

[47] Khanzadian et al. 1973.

[48] Khanzadian et al. 1973, 107–23.

a complete inventory of the finds from within the shrines at Metsamor, two discoveries are of particular note. First, fragments of a *manghal* almost identical to those from Gegharot were found in one of the shrines; the excavators interpreted the vessel to be a censer, although there is no indication of burning recorded on the vessel's interior, nor is there consistent unambiguous evidence of charring on the *manghals* from Gegharot.[49] Second, the same shrine also contained the remains of a circular plate, which the excavators interpreted as a pan for baking sacred bread.[50] Such an interpretation would certainly augment the suggestion that the stamp seals from the West Terrace and East Citadel shrines at Gegharot were used for marking dough used in aleuromantic practices.

More fragmentary comparanda are known from the pre-Urartian occupation at Karmir Blur and a deep sounding at the site of Dvin. Evidence for possible esoteric ritual practices from Dvin includes three decorated ceramic plaques that the excavator interpreted as altar stelae.[51] The plaques were recovered from three adjacent rooms (recalling the triumvirate of shrines at Gegharot). Each of the Dvin shrines also contained the remains of a range of ceramic vessels, including large storage jars, decorated pot stands, and unique "ritual" vessels, such as a decorated beaker. In addition, the shrines yielded iron and bronze arrowheads and an assortment of bronze personal adornments.[52] At Karmir Blur, two carved stone idols, formally reminiscent of the ceramic idols from Gegharot's West Terrace shrine, were found in Rooms 4 and 6 of the Iron I town. The excavator does not refer to these rooms as shrines but instead describes the statues as part of domestic religious devotion, an interpretation likely shaped by the large grain-storage pit found in Room 4.[53] The possibility of aleuromantic practices at Gegharot, combined with the fact that we have no evidence of idols associated with domestic assemblages, suggests that the Karmir Blur rooms may also have hosted mystical practices.

Several roughly contemporaneous (i.e., Late Bronze and Early Iron Age) cultic installations have been reported from the eastern part of Georgia; however, these sites allude to a ritual practice that was considerably different from the practices at the shrines documented in Armenia.[54] Most of these cultic sites are metal hoards containing bronze (and some iron) weapons, jewelry, and tools, in addition to ceramic vessels, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, and evidence for feasting (wood ash and burned animal bones), which together allude to a ritual tradition more closely linked with contemporary western Europe via a Pontic connection.[55] The Shilda sanctuary excavated in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia provides a useful example of how these cult sites seem to have functioned within a ritual ideology that was quite different from that at the shrines recorded in Armenia.[56]

The sanctuary at Shilda was not located within a larger site but appears to have been isolated, set on low-lying land rather than atop a fortified outcrop, and consists of a single, circular enclosure made of stone masonry. At the far southern end, three caches or pits were uncovered; they were filled with the remains of various ceramic vessels, including a particularly large corpus of drinking cups. On the floor of the shrine were two large storage jars that contained a cache of bronze swords, axes, daggers, and umbos as well as items of personal adornment. While the sanctuary's remains clearly recall many items—including bronze bells and zoomorphic figurines—known from mortuary contexts that excavators have often interpreted as marking the interments of ritual figures, there was nothing in the Shilda sanctuary that we can tie to the spaces of devotional ritual known from Gegharot. Indeed, the Shilda sanctuary suggests a ritual tradition starkly different from that at Gegharot. At Shilda, the multiple drinking cups and circular enclosure suggest collective group participation, with a focus on inclusion and involvement, whereas at Gegharot, the clear focus on divinatory practices suggests a sequestering and control of sacred knowledge within a privileged space linked exclusively to the emergent apparatus of sovereign power.

Late Bronze Age sites associated with either devotional public ritual or esoteric mystical practices are quite rare in the South Caucasus. Across the Near East, Anatolia, and the eastern Mediterranean, well-documented spaces of religious ritual are, in most cases, significantly more substantial than the shrines at Gegharot and likely dedicated more to devotional than to divinatory practices. The twin shrines at Beycesultan, in western Anatolia, serve as an exception, and indeed their plans are similar to those of the three shrines at Gegharot.[57] However, the substantial

[49] Khanzadian et al. 1973, 116.
[50] Khanzadian et al. 1973, 117.
[51] Kushnareva 1977, 11–17.
[52] Kushnareva 1977.
[53] Martirosyan 1964, 179–80.

[54] Pizchelauri 1984.
[55] Reinhold 2005.
[56] Maisuradze and Inanishvili 2006.
[57] Yakar 1974.

distance between Gegharot and Beycesultan (more than 1,200 km) and lack of any other evidence of contacts between the Caucasus and western Anatolia during the second millennium B.C.E. make it unlikely that the Beycesultan shrines directly influenced the shrines at Gegharot or the religious practices they hosted. The religious sites of more proximate neighbors, such as the Hittites, Canaanites, and Assyrians, tend to be more substantial temple complexes dedicated to public forms of devotional ritual, such as those at Boğazköy (Hattuša), Lachish, or Brak.[58] Even those sites referred to as "shrines" in the scholarly literature, such as the water or rock shrines of the Hittites at Karasu and Yazılıkaya,[59] are larger, more elaborate, and more conspicuous than the shrines at Gegharot and Metsamor and were likely intended for devotional practices that would have involved substantial groups of participants. Despite this difference in scale, however, a relationship between ritual spaces and political control provides a common thread. The same link between political control and ritual practice seen at Gegharot played a critical role in the creation and maintenance of ideological power across the ancient Near East. The ritual complexes and their associated priestly elites set a precedent for linking ritual and political institutions, and the shrines at Gegharot appear to bear witness to a similar process occurring in the Late Bronze Age South Caucasus.

CONCLUSION

The sequestering of divinatory practices in a series of shrines clustered behind the fortress walls of Gegharot implies a significant link between sovereignty and prognostication. The shrines at Gegharot suggest that the mystery of sovereign power is not limited to the forms of mediation attendant on the aesthetic potency of "pomp" and the technologies of publicity.[60] Another form of mediation is also critical, one that links political authority to the future via the interventions of divinatory practices and practitioners. The idols, censers, and personal adornments found within Gegharot's cloistered shrines may suggest that these spaces also played a role in public devotional worship in the sense that the practices that took place in these spaces encouraged participants to subsume themselves into a collective interest grounded in the supernatural. However, the focal point of the assemblages indicates an overwhelming emphasis on medi-

ating ties between present and future. The artifacts recovered from the three shrines provide evidence for various forms of divinatory practice that, when taken together, are quite striking: caches of marked, curated, and often scorched astragali (osteomancy and pyro-osteomancy), a collection of unique river cobbles (lithomancy), and an apparatus for grinding grain absent an oven for baking (aleuromancy). Added to this we find materials for enhancing what—for lack of a better term—we might call "altered" states (e.g., censers, wine). Collectively, these materials indicate that Gegharot served as an oracular site during the Late Bronze Age, diagnosing presents and prognosticating futures. It is important to stress that, to date, the shrines at Gegharot remain the only well-documented institutions that can be directly associated with the new forms of sovereignty that emerged in the Late Bronze Age. We have no evidence for palaces or markets, no images of royal bodies, and no unambiguous graves of charismatic kings. It is likewise critical to note that Gegharot was ultimately burned to the ground—for a second time—in a paroxysm of violence that swept across the Tsaghkahovit Plain in the early 13th or late 12th century B.C.E.

The emerging account of political authority in the Late Bronze Age Caucasus poses several questions for our understanding of both sovereignty and rituality. First, it suggests that rather than being a distinct terrain of political competition, the social and political logics that structure practices of divination lie at the very heart of the political. This is not to argue for a generalizable oracular sovereign but rather to suggest that there is a principle dear to sovereignty that was shaped at Gegharot into an apparatus of esoteric practice. As several writers have pointed out, sovereignty operates to both constitute and police the sources of its authority.[61] Divination, as a means of peering into the inner workings of the cosmos through portents of possible futures, is thus a theosophical discipline fundamental to what Foucault called "the art of government."[62] In this sense, divination articulates seamlessly with the forms of "simplification" that Scott describes as an innovation of the early modern state.[63] After all, divination makes complex presents and inscrutable futures appear to be more legible and hence more susceptible to calculation. The shrines at Gegharot thus suggest two key corrections to traditional thinking on sovereignty. First, the imagined radical historical

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[58] Tufnell et al. 1940; Bittel 1976; Heinrich and Seidl 1982; Oates et al. 1997, 13–14; Harmanşah 2007; Ellis et al. 2010.

[59] Karasu: Hellenkemper and Wagner 1977. Yazılıkaya: Güterbock 1975.

[60] Cf. Geertz 1980.

[61] E.g., Benjamin 1978; Schmitt 1985; Agamben 1998.

[62] Foucault 1979, 5.

[63] Scott 1998.

break presented by the Peace of Westphalia must be abandoned not only because traditions of antiquity leaked into modernity but also because modern political practices retain the basic conceptual processes of the past.[64] Second, the remains at Gegharot suggest that to the two primary forms of sovereignty that have preoccupied theorists since Hobbes—the royal sovereign and the democratic sovereign—we should add a third, the hieratic sovereign constituted in devotional ritual and disciplined by formalized practices of divination. Indeed, as Agamben suggests, we may well find through a broader, more sustained theological genealogy that hieratic sovereignty is in fact the only global historical form.[65]

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[64] Teschke 2003; Agamben 2011.

[65] Agamben 2011.

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